

dressed in their nineteenth-century flight gear, with vests, boots, utility belts, and goggles on the top of their heads. THEY climb a small set of bannered stairs to take their place on the lip of the cannon's muzzle, flanked by MASTON, BILSBY, BLOOMSBURY, and MORGAN. BARBICANE steps forward to the edge of the rim.)

BARBICANE: Ladies and gentlemen, you have come from around the world to witness the advancement of all humankind! (*BARBICANE catches PENROSE's eye. SHE gives HIM a smile and a small nod.*) We could not be here today without your support. This achievement is shared with all of you. I- (*His voice catches as HE is overcome with rare sentimentality. HE continues, with a tear in his eye.*) I cannot thank you enough. (*a breath, regaining a little composure, then solemnly*) Less than two years ago, the war came to its end. Though that struggle for the soul of this country had been won, we exited the battlefield into an uncertain future. This moonshot represents our hope, our assurance, that better days lie ahead. (*gaining momentum, with renewed vigor*) To be sure, much remains to be done to rebuild the nation, to ensure the liberty of every American, and to strive toward that more perfect Union. It is my hope that this endeavor – achieved with some good old Yankee ingenuity – will stand forever as a testament to what we can accomplish together!

(*The CROWD applauds, moved.*)

BARBICANE: (*with a fair amount of relish and showmanship*) Without further ado...

(*BARBICANE tosses aside the large fabric with a flourish to reveal a shining chrome projectile: a sleek bullet-shaped vehicle with a hatch to one side and a few round porthole windows riveted in place. The CROWD gasps, then applauds. Lights shift as the evening deepens. The CROWD thins as people continue enjoying the festivities, eventually exiting entirely.*)

MASTON: (*to the audience*) Ten o'clock. Forty-seven minutes to launch.

(*ARDAN, NICHOLL, and BARBICANE prepare for their voyage, checking their luggage, adjusting utility belts and harnesses, etc. As THEY do, MASTON, BILSBY, BLOOMSBURY, and MORGAN load the trunks, scientific instruments – e.g., thermometers, barometers, and telescopes – and other supplies into the projectile and perform final inspections.*)

ARDAN: (*as she prepares*) It occurs to me, Nicholl, that you have made a series of bets of very little advantage to yourself.

NICHOLL: How so?

ARDAN: If you win either of the remaining wagers, the Columbiad will have burst or the projectile will have fallen back to Earth!

NICHOLL: And?

ARDAN: And Barbicane would not be there to reimburse you! Nor you there to collect!